



# The Gnostic Discoveries: The Impact of the Nag Hammadi Library

*Marvin W. Meyer*

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The archaeological find of the twentieth century was the astounding discovery by an Egyptian peasant in December 1945 of a large storage jar filled with ancient papyrus manuscripts. Painstakingly restored and translated, these fragments came to be known collectively as the Nag Hammadi library. Through them we glimpse a fascinating alternative perspective on Jesus and many of his earliest followers, including the influence of Gnosticism on their beliefs.

"Gnosticism," a term alluding to special mystical knowledge, designates a series of religious movements that have existed since ancient times. This philosophy permeated Judaism, Greco-Roman religion, and what now appear to be different varieties of Christianity. Some of these alternative views, including Jesus's relationship to Mary Magdalene, have revolutionized biblical scholarship and were recently sensationalized by Dan Brown in his bestseller, *The Da Vinci Code*.

The struggle to publish these ancient manuscripts has at times seemed like an ancient story of Egyptian magic -- filled with curses and drama. Included in these discoveries are several gospels of Jesus's life that never made it into the modern Christian Bible as well as a treasury of lost, esoteric wisdom that portrays a side of Christianity suppressed by the institutionalized church. Meyer provides an overview of all the texts and their contents, grouping the codices by their respective genres, schools of thought, or attributed author, and discussing their meaning and significance for us today. He also provides an appendix that for the first time offers a quick survey of all the texts of the Nag Hammadi library and the Berlin Gnostic Codex, summarizing the contents of each of the texts and offering select quotations to illustrate their character and style.

*The Gnostic Discoveries* is the best available guide to the history and significance of the find at Nag Hammadi -- an amazing archaeological link to the founding of the largest religion in the world.

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